

**Remarks for Ambassador D. Brent Hardt
World Environment Day – MNRE WED Observance
Ceremony
June 5, 2013
Umana Yana, Georgetown, Guyana**

Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment, Robert Persaud,
Members of the Media.
Distinguished Guests

Thank you for the opportunity to join you today to help celebrate World Environment Day 2013. As you know, I am a great admirer of the beauty of Guyana and am deeply committed to working in partnership to restore and protect this extraordinary corner of the earth. That is why we launched *Guyana Shines* just over one year ago.

Since that time, *Guyana Shines* has been active in schools and in neighborhoods throughout Guyana, encouraging people to come together as communities to take action to end the scourge of litter and restore Guyana to its natural shine. Our core mission has been to encourage the people of Guyana to make a difference -- to stop talking about the litter problem and start doing something about it.

All of us involved with *Guyana Shines* have been absolutely thrilled with the extraordinary response we have witnessed from communities, from young people, from the private sector, government and other stakeholders to this initiative. What began as an idea of four diplomatic missions -- the U.S., UK, Canada, and the EU -- joined by Conservation International and Youth Challenge Guyana, has grown and taken root. I recall when we started on Earth Day 2012 , the initiative was welcomed by most, but there were a few skeptics who suggested our effort was merely a symbolic gesture that would not make a difference.

But something happened: the initiative became like a snowball, growing and picking up speed as it rolled along. People in communities came out to support the initiative, school groups joined in, University of Guyana students, Lions and Rotary Clubs, private sector groups, banks, and more all joined up to make a difference. Without all of these volunteers and their energy, passion, and commitment, *Guyana Shines* would not be a success.

Once we were launched, we initially started with two hands-on, volunteer-based clean-up projects in the Georgetown neighborhoods of Lodge and Tucville. Our *Guyana Shines* teams worked together with residents from these communities to support a clean-up and make them shine. *Guyana Shines* donated basic tools, including rakes, hoes, wheelbarrows, brooms, and gloves, but more importantly, we brought encouragement, devotion to a common cause, and a belief in the ability of the people of Guyana to take charge of their environment and effect positive change. After seeing what was happening, we were delighted to be approached by community leaders in East La Penitence and Festival City, who asked us to join with them in their community clean-up efforts, which we were only too happy to do, and which you, too, joined in support.

The second core element of *Guyana Shines* has been its outreach to primary and secondary schools across Georgetown. Over 50 *Guyana Shines* volunteers visited schools to make

presentations to students to increase their awareness of the harmful effects of littering and pollution and to encourage young Guyanese to care for their environment. In these educational presentations, we urged students not to be a part of the problem, but to be a part of the solution. At each school visit, we witnessed the keen interest and enthusiasm among the students, and their genuine commitment and desire to make a difference in taking care of the environment. We absolutely believe that educating young people is one of the most effective ways to transform the attitudes of an entire country. So we do hope that our *Guyana Shines* presentations have made a positive and lasting impression on all the students we have met. In the span of a year, *Guyana Shines* has reached all 62 primary and secondary schools in the Georgetown area. Reflecting the snowball effect, additional schools and organizations have approached us to request a *Guyana Shines* presentation.

Guyana Shines also joined forces with students, staff, and parents from the Marian Academy on a special project to build a

recycling shed at the school. There are many ways schools can organize and participate in environmental projects – and we strongly encourage this.

All of us can make environmentally friendly choices in our everyday lives that are easy and can make a difference. We can use re-usable tableware, silverware, and cups instead of disposable ones. We can choose products with less packaging, or ask for no bag when we buy something at a store. We can limit how much paper we waste, and use the front and back sides when possible. We can choose to shop with cloth bags instead of plastic bags. As consumers, we can choose to use biodegradable products.

Our *Guyana Shines* teams shared information on biodegradable snack containers during our school visits, and our volunteers spoke with Head Teachers and vendors outside of schools to encourage them to use cardboard or eco-friendly containers instead of styrofoam. Our Embassy has also made

efforts to “go green.” We have replaced styrofoam with cardboard containers, and we recycle paper, cardboard, and glass bottles. We encourage people to recycle in their homes, schools, and places of work.

All of this information on littering, recycling, and civic activism is important for Guyana – and that is why we remain committed to *Guyana Shines*. Our goal is to reach and inspire as many Guyanese citizens as we can to make a difference.

To expand the reach of *Guyana Shines*, we wanted to create a *Guyana Shines* documentary. The documentary – which is being premiered for the first time this afternoon at the Theater Guild at 4:00 -- will, we hope, inform and motivate more citizens to become part of the solution -- as our path-breaking volunteers have done. The documentary will allow more people to see what the *Guyana Shines* volunteers and staff have already seen -- the enthusiasm, the spirit, and the desire of people and communities throughout Guyana to live in a clean and shining country.

Hopefully, it will inspire even more people to replicate the ideas and activities they see in the documentary in their own communities.

Guyana's experience and challenge is not unique. In the United States, we also went through our own challenges in dealing with trash on the streets and in parks, and with polluted rivers and lakes. But we launched a truly national movement to "Keep America Beautiful," using education, community-based environmental activities, stricter law enforcement, and public service campaigns to change the mindset and attitudes of the American people. I am confident that a similar transformation is possible in Guyana. In fact, from what I have seen, this transformation has already begun.

Since *Guyana Shines* started last year, we have seen the government and local communities stepping up to take action to address littering, including the nation-wide 'Pick-It-Up' campaign that Minister Persaud launched last year. We have seen churches,

mosques, temples, private sector groups, schools, Rotary and Lion's Clubs, and other groups taking action to clean up the environment. We have seen a unanimous parliamentary resolution to work together to solve the environmental challenges and restore Georgetown. Four technical committees have been created to resolve the significant structural obstacles that need fixing to address the litter issue on a permanent basis. We have seen community organizations rise up to form their own clean-up campaigns and organizations – such as Youths for Guyana. All of this is encouraging, and I think it speaks to the overwhelming desire of the people of Guyana to enjoy a clean, healthy, and beautiful environment.

So this morning, I would urge all of Guyana to come together in a spirit of national unity to see how much progress can be made toward achieving a bright, shining Guyana in the coming year. When we meet again next year, I hope to be able to say that we have seen the new attitudes take deep root and that real action has taken place to clean up Guyana. I would also like

to challenge the Minister, who headed up a very successful march for World Environment Day this past Sunday: Next year, when you bring together hundreds of people to march for the environment, give them garbage bags and gloves, and encourage people to "Pick It Up" while they march. That way, people will see "Pick It Up" in action, not just as a poster on the street. Imagine what a difference four hundred people armed with garbage bags could do to some of Georgetown's streets! That way, those residents who spoke with you about the condition of their streets and alleyways would see that help is on the way, that change is coming.

In this regard, I think the Minister also made a critical point when he told Georgetown residents that their plight was part of a larger problem of local governance. And indeed it is. That is why it is also so vital to move ahead with local government elections this year. Because only when people have the ability to elect or reject local officials will they have, as you suggested, "that power . . . and that authority to ensure that those who are in

charge at the local level" support a clean and healthy environment.

At the end of the day, it is up to each of us to make a difference in our families and our communities – no matter how small or how big the effort. American anthropologist Margaret Mead once said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Mr. Minister, with your leadership and your energy, you have the ability to help lead a profound change for the better in Guyana's environment. As in the United States, it will take a sustained and truly national commitment that seeks to bring the whole country together to make a brighter future. I am confident it can and will be done.

Thank you for allowing us to be part of this change through Guyana Shines. We look forward to continuing our partnership

with the government and people of Guyana in this critical and noble endeavor. Let's make Guyana Shine again!

Thank you.